



Communist University Introductions

These texts may be used as “openings to discussion” of the original reading texts that are supplied by the CU. They are not intended to be authoritative or conclusive. They are contributions to discussion like any other such contributions. The introductions are not a substitute for the reading texts.

The Classics, Part 5



The Housing Question

In the period following the 1867 publication of Capital, Volume 1, the rise and fall of the Paris Commune in 1871, and the relative lapse of the formal International Working Men's Association (the "First International") in 1872, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels continued to be active and prominent leaders.

The international working-class movement continued to correspond and to meet. There was a [Congress in Ghent](#), Belgium in 1877, and what is regarded as the [Founding Congress of the Second International](#) took place in Chur, Switzerland in 1881 (This was still within the lifetime of Karl Marx, who died at age 65 in 1883). Between these two meetings the main body of anarchists dropped out of formal liaison with the organised communists, never to return.

Within all this there is a continuity of solidarity. Anti-communist bourgeois historians (e.g. the authors of the [Wikipedia entry on the Second International](#)) are inclined to depict a collapse and a vacuum in this period, followed by a sudden re-founding of the "socialist international" in 1889, in Paris. The fullest record of the [founding of the Second International](#) is, as usual, on the Marxists Internet Archive. It shows continuity, and not a vacuum.

Some of the struggles in the International were repetitions of even earlier ones. This is well illustrated by Engels' book called "[The Housing Question](#)" (attached; downloadable extract linked below). As we have noted, the first published "classic" of Marxism (at least according to Lenin's judgement) was "[The Poverty of Philosophy](#)", which came out in 1847 and was a polemic against the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865).

It does sometimes help to regard Marxism as a matter of marking out boundaries, or borders. The first demarcation is the one that separates the Bourgeoisie from the Proletariat, as was done, for example, in the "[Communist Manifesto](#)" of 1848. Although this division and the consequent prospect of class struggle is contested by some liberals, yet most bourgeois intellectuals find themselves obliged to accept it, most of the time.

This boundary is not the only one that is required for an all-round definition of Marxism. From the start, a different lot of liberals, usually called anarchists or "ultra-leftists" but still essentially liberals, challenged Marx and Engels at every point. Their names crop up even before the 1845 genesis of Marxism: Stirner, Weitling, Proudhon. Later, Bakunin wastes time in the First International by opposing the organised proletarian communists.

Now, in 1872, a quarter of a century after the publication of “the first mature work of Marxism” (i.e. “The Poverty of Philosophy”), and with Marx’s old antagonist (Proudhon) long deceased, Engels finds it necessary to re-launch the polemic against Proudhon, in this classic work “The Housing Question”. This was because of a resurgence of “Proudhonism”.

Thanks to his own 1845 book, “[The Condition of the Working Class in England](#)”, Frederick Engels was already a pioneer of urban studies.

Hence one might approach his book “[The Housing Question](#)” (linked below) expecting answers to the housing question. One might hope for instructions about what to build. One might expect sermons about “delivery”, or even model house-plans. Instead, one finds severe polemic about very fundamental issues of class struggle.

Let us first briefly consider what “polemic” is.

The rules of polemic are roughly these: It is done in writing. It is always against another named individual’s writing. It is direct and frank and it shows little regard for bourgeois squeamishness; on the other hand, it pays the utmost respect to the meaning of the opponent’s words. Opponents in polemic never misrepresent each other. Everything is permissible, except misrepresentation.

For example, Engels begins the linked text with references to his opponent Mulberger, who had complained that Engels had been blunt to the point of rudeness. Engels concedes little more than sarcasm:

“I am not going to quarrel with friend Mulberger about the ‘tone’ of my criticism. When one has been so long in the movement as I have, one develops a fairly thick skin against attacks, and therefore one easily presumes also the existence of the same in others. In order to compensate Mulberger I shall try this time to bring my ‘tone’ into the right relation to the sensitiveness of his epidermis.”

But later, admitting that he had misrepresented Mulberger on a particular (quite small) point, Engels lambastes himself as “irresponsible”.

“This time Mulberger is really right. I overlooked the passage in question. It was irresponsible of me to overlook it...”

After his remarks about “Mulberger”, Engels goes straight into a long paragraph (the second half of page 1, going over to page 2) that contains a summary of theory and practice, vanguard and mass, from the 1840s up until his point of writing, just one year after the fall of the Paris Commune. The paragraph mentions “the necessity of the political action of the proletariat and of the **dictatorship of the proletariat** as the transitional stage to the abolition of classes and with them of the state.”

This is the Communist Manifesto all over again. So, we can ask, why does Engels “go to town” to this extent? Is this not merely “housing” we are talking about? Is not housing something that everybody needs? Classless, surely? A win-win situation? Motherhood and apple-pie?

Engels says: NO! Engels says: the class struggle is here, and everywhere.

What we can read in Mulberger, through Engels’ eyes, is the petty-bourgeois (and full bourgeois) greed for this Housing Question as a means, or a tool, for reproducing petty-bourgeois consciousness, and this is just exactly how the post-1994 South African Government started dealing with the housing question. Yes, there should be lots of houses, it said in effect, but they must be petty-bourgeois-style houses, both in physical type, and in form of ownership.



The argument about housing is an argument about the reproduction of capitalism. It is an argument about the continuation of the ascendancy of bourgeois values over those of the working-class. For the bourgeoisie, the creation of a dwelling is an opportunity to invest the house with peasant-like values of individuality, and with petty-bourgeois ideas of “entrepreneurship”, and to regulate and control the people according to these values.

Everything that happened in “housing” in South Africa post-1994 is pre-figured in the banal prescriptions of Mulberger that Engels lambastes. Any critique of housing in South Africa will inevitably have to follow the example of Engels if it is to be of any use. Please, comrades, read the first pages and the last paragraphs of this document, even if you cannot read all of it.

As the **Communist Manifesto** says, the history of all hitherto-existing societies has been a history of class struggle. The coming “development” period of South African history will also be a period of class struggle. We may not necessarily win every specific struggle. But what this text of Engels says is: let us never fool ourselves. Win or lose, we are in a class struggle, and there is no neutral ground, least of all on the question of housing and land development.

Pictures: **Shack**, Abahlali BaseMjondolo; **RDP House**, David Goldblatt: “Miriam Mazibuko watering the garden of her new RDP house, Extension 8, Far East Bank, Alexandra Township, Johannesburg, 12 September 2006. It has one room. For lack of space, her four children live with her parents-in-law.”

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Housing Question, Part Three, Frederick Engels, 1872.](#)
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On Authority; On Political Indifferentism

Today we have two short pamphlets, one by Engels and one by Marx, one on “Authority” and one on “Indifferentism”, compiled together in one document, attached, and downloadable via the link below.

Says Engels: Either the anti-authoritarians don't know what they're talking about, in which case they are creating nothing but confusion; or they do know, and in that case they are betraying the movement of the proletariat. In either case they serve the reactionaries.

This was written in 1872 and published in 1874, in Italy. It is a “classic” because it addresses a familiar argument, still found today. The “politically correct” of the day were saying that all forms of “authority” were bad and must be done away with. Engels corrects this “politically correct” error.

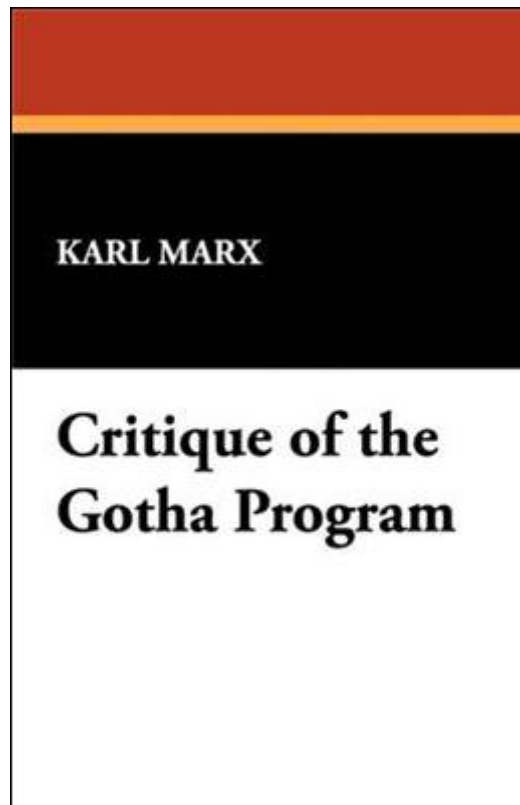
Marx, writing in 1873, also for eventual publication in Italy in 1874, addresses what he calls “Political Indifferentism”. In this pamphlet, Marx first quotes Proudhon, and readers can be deceived to think that Marx is approving of Proudhon. But this is only polemic. Marx quotes Proudhon extensively, only so as, all the more thoroughly, to contradict him.

This is a very profound lesson of Karl Marx's. What he is saying is that although, under the bourgeois dictatorship, in the bourgeois democracy, whose choices are all bourgeois choices, yet we cannot therefore say that we should have nothing to do with it, and refuse to choose.

On the contrary, we have to study it with more attention than anyone else, and make the tactically right choices in the interest of the working class.

In South Africa in the early 21st century, clearly the communists are deeply involved in the politics of the bourgeois state, and Marx would, according to this text, say that such involvement is more than inevitable: It is deliberate and it is right. The communists cannot remain indifferent to what the bourgeoisie is doing.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Engels, On Authority, 1872; Marx, Political Indifferentism, 1873.](#)
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Critique of the Gotha Programme

Today's attached document, also linked below, is Marx's [Critique of the Gotha Programme](#). It is a great classic. Among our sixteen current Communist University courses, it is used in four of them.

In this case, our introduction can largely come from Great Lenin himself, in the fifth chapter of "The State and Revolution". That chapter is dedicated to "The Critique of the Gotha Programme".

Writing of the "withering away of the state", Lenin begins by making a distinction between the "polemical" and the "positive" parts of this text of Marx's:

"Marx explains this question most thoroughly in his Critique of the Gotha Programme. The polemical part of this remarkable work, which contains a criticism of Lassalleanism, has, so to speak, overshadowed its positive part, namely, the analysis of the connection between the development of communism and the withering away of the state."

Lenin takes the "theory of development" as a given, fixed and firm. He writes:

"The whole theory of Marx is the application of the theory of development - in its most consistent, complete, considered and pithy form - to modern capitalism. Naturally, Marx was faced with the problem of applying this theory both to the forthcoming collapse of capitalism and to the future development of future communism."

In "The State and Revolution", Lenin quotes the following directly from "The Critique of the Gotha Programme":

*"Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one into the other. Corresponding to this is also a political transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary **dictatorship of the proletariat**."*

In the same chapter, Lenin notes in his own words, as follows:

"In the Critique of the Gotha Programme, Marx goes into detail to disprove Lassalle's idea that under socialism the worker will receive the "undiminished" or "full product of his labor". Marx shows that from the whole of the social labor of society there must be deducted a reserve fund, a fund for the expansion of production, a fund for the replacement of the "wear and tear" of machinery, and so on. Then, from the means of consumption must be deducted a fund for administrative expenses, for schools, hospitals, old people's homes, and so on. Instead of Lassalle's hazy, obscure, general phrase ("the full product of his labor to the worker"), Marx makes a sober estimate of exactly how socialist society will have to manage its affairs."

The following, directly taken from Marx's text, is a point for the advocates of nationalisation to ponder. In the Critique of the Gotha Programme, the best that Marx can manage to say for co-ops is:

"That the workers desire to establish the conditions for co-operative production on a social scale, and first of all on a national scale, in their own country, only means that they are working to revolutionize the present conditions of production, and it has nothing in common with the foundation of co-operative societies with state aid. But as far as the present co-operative societies are concerned, they are of value only insofar as they are the independent creations of the workers and not protégés either of the governments or of the bourgeois."

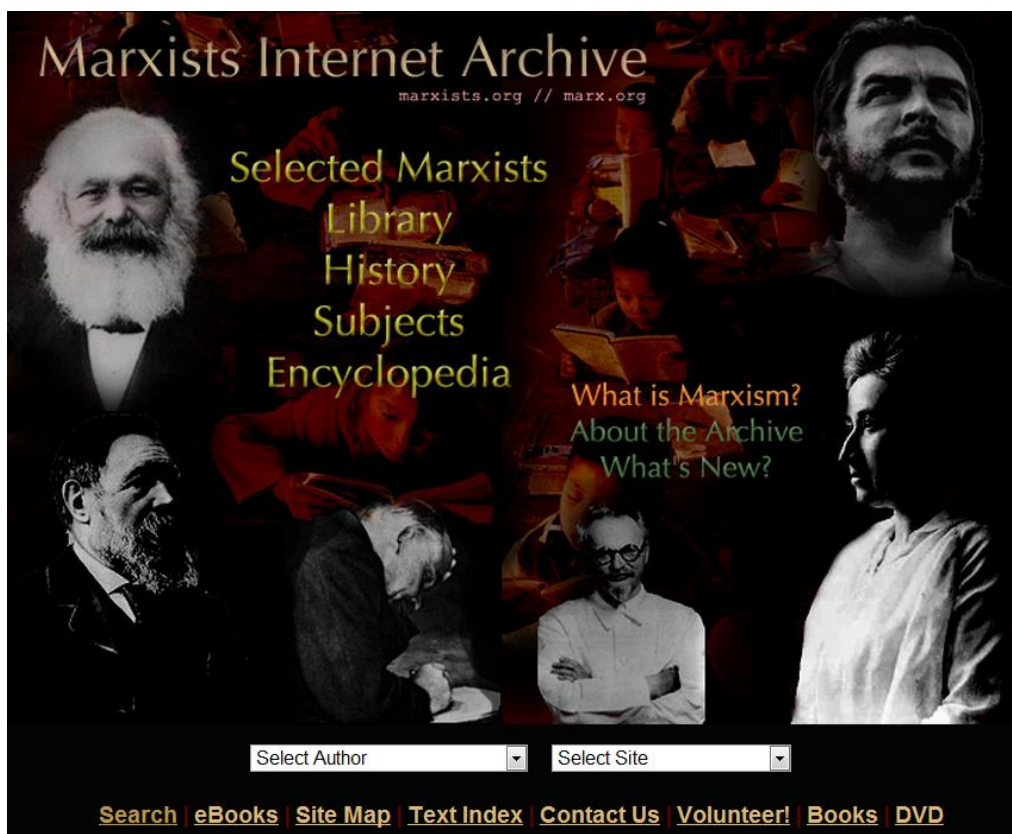
Lenin remarks (about the Gotha Programme):

“Vulgar socialism (and from it in turn a section of the democrats) has taken over from the bourgeois economists the consideration and treatment of distribution as independent of the mode of production and hence the presentation of socialism as turning principally on distribution.”

Socialism is not all about “delivery”.

The Critique of the Gotha Programme is a very relevant document for today, and it is short. It is a classic. It is worth studying.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The Critique of the Gotha Programme, Part 1, and Part 2, Marx, 1875.](#)
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A Classic web site: <http://www.marxists.org/>

Socialism, Utopian and Scientific

The main attached and downloadable linked text below is “[Socialism, Utopian and Scientific](#)”, by Frederick Engels. It is a (relatively) short text derived from three chapters of Engels’ larger classic work, “[Anti-Dühring](#)” (which we can therefore reasonably treat as having been covered in this course on “The Classics”).

This text reflects to some extent upon what a “Classic” is. Dealing with the period subsequent to the Italian Renaissance and prior to the French Revolution, which is often referred to as “The Enlightenment”, Engels writes:

“We know today that this kingdom of reason was nothing more than the idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie; that this eternal Right found its realization in bourgeois justice; that this equality reduced itself to bourgeois equality before the law; that bourgeois property was proclaimed as one of the essential rights of man; and that the government of reason, the Contrat Social [Social Contract] of Rousseau, came into being, and only could come into being, as a democratic bourgeois republic. The great thinkers of the 18th

century could, no more than their predecessors, go beyond the limits imposed upon them by their epoch."

Therefore what were "Classics" in bourgeois philosophy, such as the works of the romantic philosopher [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](#), are not necessarily classics for all time. What may be "classic" at any particular time is something that changes, over time. The classics for the purposes of this ten-part course are the Marxist classics, and "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific" is a typical one.

By Utopian, Engels meant imaginary, or ideal, and therefore typical of the early socialists such as Robert Owen, Henri de Saint-Simon, and François Fourier. Marx and Engels respected these pioneers but also distinguished themselves critically from them. The [third part of the Communist Manifesto](#) of 1848 discusses the differences.

Engels begins "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific" with the [Great French Revolution](#) that started in 1789. From this point on we can meet the class protagonists who allied and clashed from that time until now, in all possible permutations: alliances holy and unholy, strategic and tactical, marriages of convenience and marriages made in heaven.

These classes were the feudal aristocrats; the peasants; the bourgeoisie; and the proletariat.

This work of Engels' has the additional benefit of introducing the rudiments of political philosophy, and also of leading our thoughts towards the "democratic bourgeois republic", which is at one and the same time the highest form of political life before socialism - the prerequisite of concerted proletarian action - and on the other hand is a form of the State that has to be transcended and left behind.

Engels describes the limitation imposed upon the human Subject by the objective circumstances, and also the possibility of transcending such limitations. This is humanism. Humanism says that humans build humanity within the given material world and history.

There is no great need to search for modern summaries of the classics when the masters have themselves provided very good summaries of their own work. Frederick Engels in particular left great summarising, concretising texts, especially towards the end of his friend Karl Marx's life, and after Marx's death in 1883.

The September 2010 SACP Discussion Document, called "[Expanding Democratic Public Control over the Mining Sector](#)", makes good use of "Socialism, Utopian and

Scientific” to carry a crucial point about nationalisation: That Marxists have never asserted that state ownership, as such, is an inherently progressive or socialist measure. It quotes Engels:

“the official representative of capitalist society – the state – will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production. This necessity for conversion into state property is felt first in the great institutions for intercourse and communication – the post office, the telegraphs, the railways.” (Engels, “Socialism: Utopian and Scientific”, 1880).

Engels was very clear that in such cases, state ownership was NOT about abolishing capitalism.

On the contrary:

“the transformation...into state property, does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces... The more it [the bourgeois state] proceeds to the taking over of productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers – proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with. It is rather brought to a head.” (Engels, *ibid.*)

After this week, the Classics course moves beyond Marx and Engels to include Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, and Gramsci.

You can find a full, [hyperlinked list of the main works of Marx and Engels](#) on [Marxists Internet Archive](#) (home page reproduced above).

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Socialism, Utopian and Scientific, 1880, Engels, Part 1, The Development of Utopian Socialism; Part 2, The Science of Dialectics; and Part 3, Historical Materialism.](#)
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Family, Property and State

Origin of Family, Property and State

Today we feature Chapter 9, the chapter called “Barbarism and Civilisation”, of Engels’ book “[The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State](#)”. The Chapter is linked below as an MS-Word download. You can safely pass over the first three paragraphs of this chapter. They refer to previous chapters. The remainder of Chapter 9 is self-contained.

“The Origin of the Family, Private Property and The State” is a classic of the first rank, both within the field of Marxism, and more widely.

Lenin relied on it, and referred to it often for the illumination that it gives to the revolutionary question of The State, and to the necessity of the withering away of the State.

But this work of Engels’ is also foundational in Archaeology and Paleoanthropology (i.e. the study of the pre-history of human society), just as Engels’ “[The Condition of the Working Class in England](#)” was foundational to the study of the formation of cities (Urbanism, also called Urban Studies or Town Planning). Engels, who never formally attended a university, is nevertheless more than once counted among the towering historic founders of scholarly disciplines.

Marx had already worked on source material for this project, including on Henry Morgan’s 1877 book called “[Ancient Society](#)”. Engels found Marx’s working papers after Marx’s death in 1883, and immediately set to work to prepare a book from them for publication.

The particular contribution of “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State” is that it shows the common, interdependent origin of private property and the State, plus the fall of the women into the oppressive condition which they subsequently continued to suffer, plus also the institutions of money, writing and law.

The simultaneous revolutionary break in all of these things marks the end of pre-history and the beginning of history, which as Marx and Engels had noted in the [Communist Manifesto](#), was from that point onwards “a history of class struggles”.

The transition from prehistoric communism into class society took place a long time ago in some parts of the world, and much more recently in other parts. In Egypt and in Iraq (Mesopotamia) it happened more than five thousand years ago. In other parts of the world the transition happened almost within living memory.

The simultaneous nature of the triple catastrophe (property, state and downfall of women) may mean that the remedy for all three will likewise have to be simultaneous, or at least co-ordinated.

The urgent abolition or “withering away” of the State is for that reason a woman’s issue, and the socialist project is a woman’s project, because they are all part of the same complex of oppressions. Communism is a necessity for women.

The reversal of the downfall of the women can only be achieved by the abolition of property and the State. Likewise, the abolition of property and the State cannot be achieved without the conscious restoration of women to their proper place in human society. All three goals have to be achieved together.

The three goals are actually the same goal, and the name of it is [communism](#).

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Origin of Family, Property and State, Chapter 9, 1884, Engels](#).**
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Hegel



Feuerbach



Marx



Engels

Feuerbach and the End of German Philosophy

Nine years before the end of his life - he died in 1895 - and three years after Karl Marx's death, Frederick Engels returned to [the beginning](#) with his undoubtedly classic 1886 work "[Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy](#)" (attached, and downloadable via the links given below, in two separate files).

The following is how Engels confirms the place of our first (in this course) "classic" book as the original work of Marxism. "[The German Ideology](#)" at that point (1886) had not yet been saved from "the gnawing criticism of the mice". It was not published until 1932.

"In the preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, published in Berlin, 1859, Karl Marx relates how the two of us in Brussels in the year 1845 set about: "to work out in common the opposition of our view" — the materialist conception of history which was elaborated mainly by Marx — to the ideological view of German philosophy, in fact, to settle accounts

with our erstwhile philosophical conscience. The resolve was carried out in the form of a criticism of post-Hegelian philosophy. The manuscript, two large octavo volumes, had long reached its place of publication in Westphalia when we received the news that altered circumstances did not allow of its being printed. We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose — self-clarification! Since then more than 40 years have elapsed and Marx died without either of us having had an opportunity of returning to the subject.”

“Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy” is in four parts, of which the first is nominally about [George William Frederick Hegel](#) (1770-1831).

In “Ludwig Feuerbach, Part 1” Engels says that the revolutions of 1789 and 1848 were each preceded by uproar in the field of philosophy; but with differences.

Whereas the French pre-revolutionary philosophers had been banned and proscribed, Hegel had advanced in *“a triumphant procession which lasted for decades”*. At times Hegelianism had held *“the rank of a royal Prussian philosophy of state”*. In the decade following Hegel’s death, until the denunciatory lectures of Schelling in 1841 which Engels attended, *“‘Hegelianism’ reigned most exclusively.”* This reign, and the subsequent fall, was the well-ploughed philosophical ground in which Marxism germinated and started to grow. Engels says:

“At that time politics was a very thorny field, and hence the main fight came to be directed against religion; this fight, particularly since 1840, was indirectly also political.”

This proxy role played in politics by religion (and philosophy) in 1840s Germany is the reason for the apparent elevation of the dichotomy of idealism and materialism, as if this dichotomy explains everything, when by itself it explains nothing. The relationship of (thinking) Subject and (material) Object is dialectical, and not absolute.

Lenin wrote:

“It is impossible completely to understand Marx's Capital, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the whole of Hegel's Logic. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!”

So Hegel was much more than a John the Baptist to Karl Marx’s Christ. Hegel had gathered up everything that had gone before, and displayed it as unified history. Hegel made the methodology that served as Marx’s constant framework.

Engels writes:

“... with Hegel philosophy comes to an end; on the one hand, because in his system he summed up its whole development in the most splendid fashion; and on the other hand, because, even though unconsciously, he showed us the way out of the labyrinth of systems to real positive knowledge of the world.”

The second linked item is a return to Engels' Ludwig Feuerbach, in its fourth and final part, dealing with Engels' now-deceased friend Karl Marx. Engels writes:

“Out of the dissolution of the Hegelian school, however, there developed still another tendency, the only one which has borne real fruit. And this tendency is essentially connected with the name of Marx (1).

*“The separation from Hegelian philosophy was here also the result of a return to the materialist standpoint. That means it was resolved to comprehend the real world — nature and history — just as it presents itself to everyone who approaches it free from preconceived idealist crotchets. It was decided mercilessly to sacrifice every idealist fancy which could not be brought into harmony with the facts conceived in their own and not in a fantastic interconnection. And **materialism means nothing more than this.**”*

Materialism, covered in the second and third parts of this work, was crucial to Marx's theories.

Materialism gazed mercilessly at the objective universe from the point of view of the free individual human being.

But materialism did not amount to an elevation of the material universe to the status of a “prime mover” God, progenitor of life and breather of spirit into man. Materialism means nothing more than reality, as opposed to fantasy; that is, reality as seen by the human Subject.

The remainder, Part 4 of “Ludwig Feuerbach” becomes one of those grand sweeping overviews of which both Engels and Marx were capable. In this case science, philosophy and class politics are interwoven in an undoubtedly dialectical way.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Feuerbach and the end of German Philosophy, 1886, Engels.](#)



Rosa Luxemburg, 1871-1919

Reform or Revolution?

Rosa Luxemburg's "[Reform or Revolution?](#)" (attached) is a great classic. In the first place it is a thorough polemical rejection of Eduard Bernstein's 1899 "[Evolutionary Socialism](#)", which book Luxemburg deals with comprehensively, to the point where she concludes:

"It was enough for opportunism to speak out to prove it had nothing to say. In the history of our party that is the only importance of Bernstein's book."

This was true. The reformists have never made any advance on Bernstein. But they keep coming.

"Reform or Revolution?" at once became the beginning of an even more crucial polemic, this time between Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin, which generated further "classics", and which we will follow again in this week's part of our course on the classics.

Luxemburg demolishes Bernstein, but then contradicts Lenin and is in turn corrected by Lenin's final reply. In the process of these two successive polemics (first Bernstein *versus* Luxemburg and Lenin, then Luxemburg *versus* Lenin), the modern communist parties were defined sharply for the first time, and irreversibly

differentiated from the reformists, and from the reformist mass organisations such as trade unions.

Lenin published "[What is to be Done?](#)" in 1902, in response to the same book of Eduard Bernstein's and the consequent outbreak of "economism", also called "opportunism", or "reformism", or "syndicalism", (or in South Africa, "workerism"). Lenin went further than Luxemburg. Lenin's "What is to be Done?" is regarded as the defining blueprint of the communist parties as they are now. The communist parties have no compromise with reformism.

By 1919 the Communist International (also called Third International, or Comintern) had been formed and by 1921 the CPSA (now SACP) had been admitted to it as a recognised Communist Party.

Some other notable events of this period include the founding Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) in Minsk in 1898. Lenin was a member, and was the editor of the journal "*Iskra*", which he founded in 1900.

The German Social Democrats were the most numerous, well-established and long-standing of the supposedly revolutionary parties at the time. Rosa Luxemburg, though originally Polish, was a senior member of the German party.

In 1903 the Second Congress of the RSDLP took place in Brussels and London. The consequence was the split between the Bolshevik majority and the Menshevik minority, in the course of which the Mensheviks blackmailed the majority and consequently got away with most of the spoils, including the magazine "*Iskra*". Hence Lenin's detailed 1904 report of this Congress is called "[One Step Forward, Two Steps Back](#)". It is this document that prompted Rosa Luxemburg to raise objections in the form of her 1904 work known as "[Leninism or Marxism?](#)"

[Lenin's reply](#) (1904) to Rosa Luxemburg was conclusive. It settled all the open questions.

In 1905 a revolution broke out in Russia, which resolved into a bourgeois-democratic advance and the establishment of the "Duma" (parliament) in Russia. The RSDLP held its Third Congress in that year, and Lenin wrote "[Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution](#)", a full differentiation of the revolutionaries from the reformists, which we will come to.

In 1914 at the outbreak of war between the main Imperialist powers most of the Social-Democrats of the Second International, including the German Social-Democrats led by Karl Kautsky, abandoned their internationalism and sided with

their separate bourgeois ruling classes. The RSDLP held out against this collapse, while Luxemburg founded the anti-war [Spartacist League](#) in Germany. In February, 1917 a second bourgeois revolution in Russia overthrew the Tsar, and in October the Great October (proletarian) revolution was successfully carried out under Lenin's leadership.

In January 1919, Rosa Luxemburg was murdered in Berlin by the proto-fascist "Freikorps" organisation.

The attached document, also linked below, is a redacted (shortened) version of "Reform or Revolution?" prepared for discussion purposes. Two more points can usefully be picked out at this stage. The first is the direct statement of the matter at issue in the opening lines of Luxemburg's Introduction:

'Can the Social-Democracy be against reforms? Can we contrapose the social revolution, the transformation of the existing order, our final goal, to social reforms? Certainly not... It is in Eduard Bernstein's theory... that we find, for the first time, the opposition of the two factors of the labour movement. His theory tends to counsel us to renounce the social transformation, the final goal of Social-Democracy and, inversely, to make of social reforms, the means of the class struggle, its aim... But since the final goal of socialism constitutes the only decisive factor distinguishing the Social-Democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and from bourgeois radicalism, the only factor transforming the entire labour movement from a vain effort to repair the capitalist order into a class struggle against this order, for the suppression of this order—the question: "Reform or Revolution?" as it is posed by Bernstein, equals for the Social-Democracy the question: "To be or not to be?"'

The second comes within the text where Luxemburg describes the "[Sisyphus](#)"-like situation of the small enterprises under monopoly capitalism, so typical of South Africa today, as follows:

*"The struggle of the average size enterprise against big Capital... should be rather regarded as a periodic **mowing down** of the small enterprises, which rapidly grow up again, only to be mowed down once more by large industry."*

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Reform or Revolution?, Rosa Luxemburg, 1900](#).



What Is To Be Done?

The attached and downloadable document linked below is made up of extracts from Lenin's "[What Is To Be Done?](#)"

In this book Lenin was concerned to oppose what he called "economism", which is also called "syndicalism" and in South Africa in the past and still up to now, called "workerism".

Lenin was concerned to show, following the publication of Eduard Bernstein's gradualist, reformist "[Evolutionary Socialism](#)" of 1899, and Rosa Luxemburg's "[Reform or Revolution?](#)" published in 1900, that a revolutionary transformation of society was not possible without a revolutionary political party of the working class.

In a [Preface](#) to the book, Lenin explained that various internal political matters within the Russian Social-Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) had caused him to

hold the book back; if the outcome of these inner-party struggles had been different, then the book would have been written differently, Lenin wrote.

In [Chapter 1](#), it is clear that the initial thrust of Lenin's polemic is directed against Eduard Bernstein, just as Rosa Luxemburg's was, in 1900.

Trade union organisation of the working class was never going to be sufficient for revolution. Lenin showed that the workers' vanguard political party, the communist party, remains a "must-have".

"What Is To Be Done?" is the book where Lenin most clearly differentiated the reformist mass organisations from the vanguard political party of the working class, the communist party. The attached and downloadable file contains the passages that are most directly relevant to this point.

"What Is To Be Done?" is for this reason regarded as the generative blueprint for the Communist Parties as we know them, and of the form that they took after the October, 1917 revolution in Russia and in particular following the formation of the Comintern in 1919.

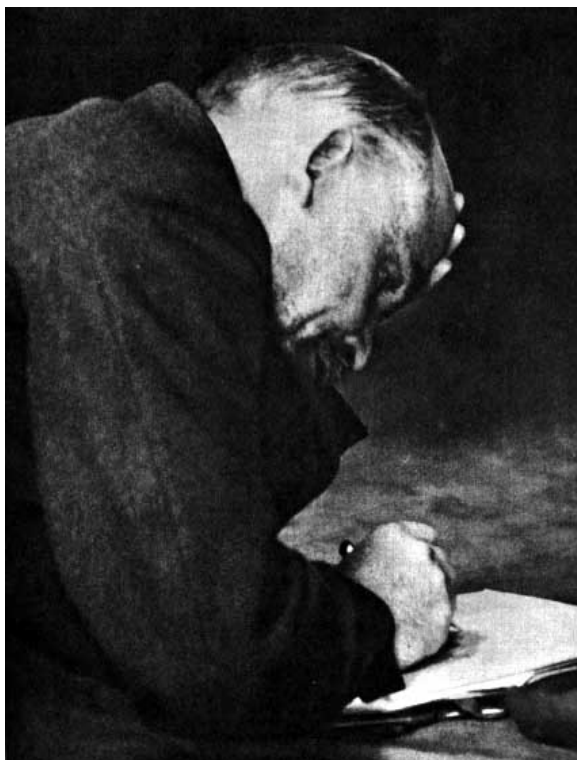
The SACP is one such Party, formed in 1921 under the Comintern's rules and at the same time admitted to membership of that organisation, as it remained until the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943.

The blueprint is most precisely seen in Part C, "Organisation of Workers and Organisation of Revolutionaries", which is included in the linked document.

Lenin concludes: *"...our task is not to champion the degrading of the revolutionary to the level of an amateur, but to raise the amateurs to the level of revolutionaries."*

Next in this part, we will look at Lenin's report of the Second Congress of the RSDLP.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [What Is To Be Done?, Parts B and C, Lenin, 1902.](#)**
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Lenin the writer

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

With Lenin's books, the titles are often so exceptional that they pass into the language without people knowing what the book was about. Sometimes this leads to people "quoting" such a title in aid of a cause which is at odds with the actual book that Lenin wrote. Such is often the case with "What is to be Done?", words that opportunists, utilitarians and "economists" love to use to prop up their actually anti-Leninist arguments. You have to read the book to know that.

["One Step Forward, Two Steps Back"](#) (1904) is another unforgettable title of Lenin's that people are often happy to repeat, as a form of words, without any knowledge or understanding of Lenin's work of that name or of its place in history.

"One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" is a unique work, different from all others. It is a classic. It is Lenin's report of the 1903 Second Congress of the RSDLP, which had given rise to the terms "Bolshevik" and "Menshevik" and all that went with the famous split in the ranks of the RSDLP.

Roughly, the step forward was the winning of a majority in the Congress, while the two steps back were first the loss of *Iskra*, and then the loss of the Central Committee, following the lobbying of the Mensheviks after the Congress. The

Mensheviks got themselves co-opted where they had not been elected, and proceeded to undermine and ruthlessly expel the good Bolsheviks who had been elected.

As unique as it was, historically speaking, yet the split between the “opportunist” Mensheviks and the revolutionary Bolsheviks does have universal resonance, and applicability as a lesson. It was not the first such split. Marx and Engels had experienced a few similar contradictions, such as the one that gave rise to Marx’s “Critique of the Gotha Programme”. Lenin himself makes a comparison with the split in the Great French Revolution between the “Montagne” and the “Gironde”. Later, there was the great 1914 split in the Social-Democratic Parties at the time of the Imperialist First World War. There have been many more splits, since then, including the post-Polokwane formation of COPE in South Africa.

The Communist University has put some parts of this book together, and placed a later (1907) reflection of Lenin’s, from the Preface to Lenin’s collection “[Twelve Years](#)”, in front of them. This composite document is attached and linked below. Clearly, the division between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks had not gone away by 1907, and we know that it did not go away until it was resolved another ten years later in the October, 1917 revolution.

A little time spent with this shortened version of Lenin’s book will help to gauge the nature of Rosa Luxemburg’s response to it, which will be given next, together with Lenin’s rebuttal of Rosa.

Lenin’s final reply, also given in the next item, settled this particular matter as between these two great revolutionaries, although it was not the last of their disagreements.

- **The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [One Step Forward, Two Steps Back, Compilation, Lenin, 1904](#).**
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“Leninism or Marxism?”

What we have with today’s two texts – [Rosa Luxemburg’s](#) so-called “[Leninism or Marxism?](#)”, and [Lenin’s reply](#) to it, (attached; downloads are linked below) – is a partial record of an attempted comprehensive political mugging of V I Lenin at an early stage.

By 1904 Lenin was already widely recognised as the most clear-minded and exceptional revolutionary leader in the world, including by his opportunist, reformist Russian opponents, and also by the leaders of the well-established, quite large, and legal “Social Democracy” of Germany (the German Social-Democratic Party).

Reading Lenin’s 1904 reply it is clear that at this point the gains of the Second Congress of the RSDLP had already been lost, and that not only Rosa Luxemburg, but also the “Pope” of Social Democracy at the time – the German, [Karl Kautsky](#) – had turned against Lenin. So had [Georgi Plekhanov](#), one of the founders of Russian socialist exile politics (the [Emancipation of Labour Group](#)) who had been Lenin’s close comrade in their “brilliant three-year campaign” prior to the Second Congress, based around the magazine *Iskra*, of which Lenin had been the founder and editor.

The Mensheviks had got back into power after their defeat at the 1903 RSDLP Second Congress by special pleading and blackmail. Once inside the political tent, they had forced out the Bolsheviks. The Mensheviks now controlled *Iskra*, and hardly allowed the Bolsheviks to have any space in it. They controlled the RSDLP Central Committee, and were refusing to hold another Congress. The Mensheviks even wanted to expel Lenin for the fact that he had founded another magazine called *Vperyod*, which later became *Proletary*, to carry on the work of the old *Iskra*.

This is when, in 1904, we find Rosa Luxemburg, who had in 1900 resoundingly vanquished the chief reformist, Bernstein, now attacking Lenin. It is hard not to think that she has been deceived into turning 180 degrees in this way, against her natural ally, Lenin, especially in the light of the subsequent history when in 1914 Lenin and Luxemburg became the two most outstanding opponents of the capitulation of the Second International to national chauvinism, Imperialism and war.

In 1914 the German Social Democrats, under Kautsky, voted to support the Imperialist war. Rosa refused, and instead she helped start the Spartacus League, a German equivalent of the Russian Bolsheviks, who had also refused to support the war. Kautsky's sell-out was eventually damned by Lenin in his classic 1918 work "[The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky](#)", but Kautsky continued spreading lies until his death in 1938. Rosa Luxemburg did not sell out. She died a martyr in 1919 at the hands of the reactionary fore-runners of German fascism, the Freikorps.

Back in 1904 it looks as if Lenin is isolated, with only Comrade Galyorka to support him. Yet he staged a comeback, to become in practice the greatest revolutionary leader the world has ever known. How did this happen? From other writings it is clear that Lenin, both before the Congress and after it, was relying not on the top leaders, nor on the more remote intellectuals, but upon those much closer to the working-class rank-and-file.

Lenin had done what the supporters of Jacob Zuma did from 2005 to 2007 in South Africa. He had made sure that the branches were with him, and he with them.

With the help of the base, Lenin pulled the superstructure back into shape. The third RSDLP Congress, held in 1905, was a firmly Bolshevik Congress.

Rosa Luxemburg's essay, when read with the benefit of Lenin's reply, is revealed as a very poor piece of work indeed. It happens to the best of us. People make mistakes.

The subsequent history of this document of Rosa's, as told by MIA, is one of repeated exploitation of Rosa Luxemburg's temporary mistake. It has been reprinted several times, but always without the inclusion of Lenin's reply. Rosa was used in her lifetime, to write this false denunciation of Lenin for "military ultra-centralism" and other spurious accusations, and after her death she continued to be so used.

The denunciation in the title (which is not Luxemburg's title) is false, because there is no opposition between "Leninism" and "Marxism".

The whole story is a classic case-study in political deception, recovery, and triumph over deception. But to know that, you must read Lenin's reply.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Leninism or Marxism?, Rosa Luxemburg, 1904](#), and [Lenin's Reply to Rosa Luxemburg, 1904](#).
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Course: The Classics

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